

Coins

Veto takes wind out of silver dollar sales

By Roger Boye

MORE QUESTIONS from readers are answered in this week's column.

Q—A few years back, I bought four Carson City silver dollars from the government in those widely publicized sales. I would like to give the coins to my grandchildren, but I need to buy two more. Does the government have more to sell?—T.V., Arlington Heights.

A—Yes, at least 950,000 of them, but it may be a while before the coins are sold.

Last November, President Carter vetoed a bill that would have allowed the General Services Administration to sell the coins. Carter's gripe was not with the proposed sale, but with an unrelated section of the bill dealing with import trade restrictions. Presumably, the new Congress will pass another sale-authorization bill, but this time without controversial attachments.

Incidentally, the Carson City dollars, most dated 1883 and 1884, are part of a 2.9 million silver dollar hoard discovered in government vaults in the early 1960s. About two million of the coins were sold earlier this decade.

Q—For some time, I've been intrigued by the 20-cent piece, a coin

minted for only four years in the 1870s. Why did the government start making such a coin? Why did the coin die out so quickly?—A.N., Chicago.

A—Apparently, several congressmen wanted to create another guaranteed market for silver from the West. However, people confused the coin with quarters already in circulation because both coins had almost identical Liberty-seated designs. Some individuals simply scratched the word "twenty" off the 20-cent piece, making an easy five-cent "profit."

Q—I got a paper-thin penny in change at a newspaper stand. The date and lettering are blurred, and the coin has a strange ring when dropped. Is it a collectors' item?—K.M., Oak Lawn.

A—Most likely, no. It is easy to create a thin cent with the proper acids, as chemistry students know all too well. Such coins are worthless.

Before you throw away the coin, however, have it examined by a dealer or other expert to be certain it isn't an authentic (and valuable) mint error.

If you have questions about coins or currency, send them to Roger Boye, Arts and Fun, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Av., Chicago, Ill. 60611. Do not send coins, and enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want a personal reply.